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AFTER THE CALM.

As the mist deepens day by day, less diaphanous in the mornings, and the hills are hidden, a wondrous silence everywhere—a change is going on, like a stream rising imperceptibly. There is a fresh touch of crispness in the air at nights; and occasionally, if you look towards the north-west, you can feel a passing breath on your face, as if some one had breathed upon it. Very late in the evenings, listening intently, there is a far-off sound, a moaning in the pines before the coming storm. A gentle movement in the ivy ruffles every shining leaf, but only for a moment ere it has gone. Presently, there comes another rush, more violent than the last—a shower of leaves flutter in the air, a boom across the valley resembling a rushing wind in the sea-caves, a dash of cold spray upon the casement—then silence deep, insensate as the grave. In your troubled dreams you seem to hear the uneven din of conflict, the hollow thud of mighty rain; and, as morning struggles through, the mists have rolled away, a drenching, blinding rain obscures the distant hills, the forest has rocked before the gale—the Equinox has come.

Under the dripping hedgerows next the covert side, a running stream fills every ditch, where the sodden leaves lie thickening before the wind, as they come down in whirling showers from the elms, bare at the summit now, like a ship half dismantled of her swelling canvas. On the sloping lawn, but yesterday hard and smooth, small heaps of earth arise where the worms have been at work; countless leaves wedged in tiny crevices, as if they had been planted there, seem to disappear before the observer's eye, drawn down into a million subterranean passages, to fertilise next spring's pasture. Every infinitesimal mound thrown up round the bare roots of the sward comes up to make a top-dressing, more nutritious than the most life-giving manure, acting at the same time as a drain. Without a sound or semblance of life visible, millions of earthworms in this out-pasture toil on night and day, draining

and fructifying, without fee or reward, changing every spring and autumn the character of the soil; drawing down in leaves and decaying vegetation the richest plant-food, and exuding a wealth of matter such as no science can supply. And all this infinite and necessary labour accomplished unseen, unaided, save by that instinct granted so mercifully by the great Architect himself.

Are there voices in the gale, or is it that 'the sightless couriers of the air' fan the sleeping flame of imagination? There is a steady roar in the great wood, changed almost out of recognition since yesterday, like the din of some great conflict, an angry boom high up in the rocking branches beaten by the rain. There is no doubt of this majestic wrath, something awe-inspiring, almost terrible, in its belching thunder. It comes rushing past overhead with a swift motion, as of an aerial squadron of cavalry sweeping on to a solid phalanx of expectant soldiery; the sharp shrill screams might pass for a flight of bullets whirling by. But if there be no hidden message in the wind, we can read something in the hoarse trumpet-calls—the victory of the gale in the fight, renewed with the red rising of the sun; a triumph over nature. First the leaves turn to glowing colours, then fall, and reveal branches bare, like a useless fleet of ships in dock. We can read in the dismal moan the tale of leaden skies, where the heavenly sluices are drawn up to the deluge; of long bleak nights under the cold moon; of the wind whistling mournfully outside the casements, and the great wood lying under a white pall. Day by day the issue of the conflict becomes clearer, till the final consummation is attained. There is something inexpressibly sad in the last shower of falling leaves, the last wild wheel of the swallow as he poises his flashing wings, and turns his sunny back to cold northern skies and the mad north-western gale.

The deep red fallow, where only yesterday the dry clods ground under foot like powder, holds rain-water in the hollows; the plough has been dragged out from its bed of nettles and dock-leaves under the hedge, its share pointed to the

furrows. Guiding the handles, a stalwart countryman lounges along, with many a blithe whistle and droning admonition to his team, tearing up the earth into long even ridges, thrown over smoothly, as if cut by a knife. Close behind, in grave procession, a colony of rooks follows, making little noise, for this is a strictly business matter with them, and the feeding is rich and varied. The sheep-dog, following the furrows, turns occasionally and scatters these sable visitors, till they rise and wheel in wide gyrations, with tail feathers spread, bearing up against the wind. They do not rise with a swift, sudden motion—no rook ever does—but hop solemnly three times before their pinions bear them upwards. There is an angry chatter borne down the breast of the gale; they drop down again one by one in a long string, following up the plough. The ploughman holds the guiding lines upon the handles of his plough, as he heels over against the stubble, much as a cyclist sways with his machine round a sharp curve. There are furrows at equal distances to check the evenness, straight as an arrow from hedge to hedge—marvellously true.

Suddenly, in the din and roar, a quick flash of light breaks through the clouds in the north-west, a brilliant ray of sunshine, as every cloud seems to melt away into an imperial blue. A great silence falls; you can hear the wind moaning away in the deepening distance; the forest trees no longer rock in the cradle of the gale—the leaves alone tremble and murmur. As the light shines down from above, every one of them seems transparent, a pale, yellow, reluctant glow faintly tinged with pink; the eating chestnut a deeper brown; the Spanish chestnut more opalescent. Between two belts of larch, the trunks shining like silver, is a long stretch of bracken, breast high, and tinted with a wild array of fantastic colouring; some of the fronds a golden yellow, splashed with red, and mottled in the greater leaves; another spray a faint cream, again with the subtle presence of pink, a tint which is more suggested to the mind than seen. Looking down the opening, filled with this soft nebulous fire, the eye is conscious of a thousand gradations of mordant emblazoning. Perhaps there are actually but three at most to which art could give a name, though in this distemper, this carnival of gorgeous staining, a practical analysis of dyes could see nothing but a poor achromatism; but it comes, meteoric to the eye, as the most brilliant dyes come from the blackest coal-tar. It is a self-luminosity, a phosphorescent glow, the clearer for the rain and sunshine. Over it the ash-wands arise, and round them a delicate tracery of brambles; dogrose with dull red berries, a faint bloom upon them, in contrast to the wild-grape fruit, glowing out of their golden setting like a priceless carbuncle. Here, underneath, is a graceful weed with a long stem, milky white upon the one side, purple on the other, with leaves shaped like a rose; a washed-out cream, opal blue on the edges, and barred in every delicate vein with the bloomy blue of an Orleans plum; only a wild woodland weed, to which one cannot give a name; yet the dew and rain and morning sun have beautified it as if it had been some priceless flower. It is like walking through a glowing furnace, a painless fire filled round and overhead with autumn gold; every flicker of the leaves a lambent flame, every

bending wand an ignis-fatuus, an aurora of its own creation; a yellow furnace with the cardinal colours in the fire, a faint rubescence rubifying to the eyes, mantling and changing in its wondrous phantasmagoria. Words fail, while the senses are lifted up and glorified.

But the fresh-born silence is rudely broken by the tramp of many feet, a wild hollo, and strange calls as the beaters force their way through the dense undergrowth. Almost at their feet, a brilliant meteor arises, and with a peculiar corkscrew flight, whirls over the oaks to the drives where the guns are standing. Down the wind he comes, with drum and whistle; a hidden voice cries 'Maark!' as he flashes over the brief opening; bang! go the guns, and down straight pitches the beautiful bird, crash into a thicket, followed by the dogs. The old retriever has him. See how gently he takes the quarry in his mouth, with just one upward toss of his curly black head, to carry the bonny cock on the balance, so that not so much as a feather shall be disarranged. Down at our feet he lays him on the grass, a last year's bird in full plumage, as the tuft of saffron feathers, the wiry feathers above the tail, denote. What a radiant sheen is upon his neck, a bronze gold shading down the throat to a gorgeous purple, with the scarlet plush under the eyes. The woods are lofty here, and every bird clears them a veritable 'rocket' as they cross the line of fire in quick succession, amidst a constant fusillade from the guns, and strange cries from the beaters as they call to one another. But, fast as they come, the keenest shot in the country would be no match for most of them, for the sight is wonderfully short and the birds are high overhead. Presently, a lull comes, and looking down the drive, you may see a rabbit skip across, jumping as he reaches the open; and a frightened blackbird, with his shrill piping scream, standing out with his peculiar flirt of the tail and rapid dropping of the wings, which always denotes alarm in the 'stormcock,' as the village hinds call him. An old dog-fox, with a white tag to his brush, slinks across the drive stealthily, the very embodiment of vulpine grace, though his fur is wet and draggled, and the clay on his pads shows signs of a long marauding excursion. Like a snake in the grass comes a stoat, crawling close to the herbage—never, as is his wont, showing more of his lithe, long frame than is necessary for locomotion.

Since I stood, gun in hand, in this same spot a week ago, I note a wondrous change. There is a wild crab tree hard in front, against an ash sapling. Seven days since, the fruit was green and hard; the ash sapling a mass of leaves; now the apples peer down from the branches a ruddy red; the ash bears upon its poles but a scant handful of yellow mottled foliage. Since my last visit, the birds, driven in from the stubbles, have commenced to eat the berries. Here is a bush of wild-rose—not the pink-flushed rose with the yellow centre, but the white variety, with the smooth black stem, which blooms in July—though, strangely enough, the haws are wont to open sooner than that of the fairer and more delicate sister-flower. The haws are smaller, but dead ripe now; and on the bush opposite, every shining berry has been scooped out, only leaving the husk. Close

alongside is an ordinary dogrose bramble, the haws much larger, but as yet untouched; and if you gather one, you will note that on the underside they are still pale yellow. Looking closely at the brier, they would appear to be uniformly red; it is only on the under side next the ground that the yellow gleam can be seen. But the birds know. A little to the right is a thorn-tree, its leaves burnt a deep brown; a vivid mass of berries, so that they seem to weigh down the branches. In a somewhat observant life, spent for the most part by mead and stream, and never for very long beyond 'the babble o' green fields,' I have never seen the berries as they are this year. The village hind by my side, with the recollection of more than one hard, cruel winter before him, sighs as I point out this profusion, and prophesies another winter like the last. 'When the A'mighty sends all them hips [berries], it ain't for nout,' he says. 'The birds do know. See how the starlings begin to forgather o' marnings. Did ye ever know them so early afore?' That God sent the berries to feed his feathered choir, and that, according to the berries, so will the winter be, my companion firmly believes. Perhaps he is right; his faith is not far wrong. He has a simple west-country face, and a clear ruminative eye; it is only when he walks that you see what a cripple he is from the hereditary rheumatism, perhaps accelerated by the cider he drinks in such quantities. Even the boys beating in the woods, fine healthy lads all of them, begin to show, by the stiffness in their knees, that the old curse is upon them. Truly, it is wonderful with what patience, hardship and want and pain can be borne by our labourer of the fields without complaint, and what a little it takes to gladden his simple soul.

We beat the woods in transverse sections, working higher as we do so, till we reach the summit. The brightness of the afternoon holds good, though, occasionally, a long gust of wind tears over the oaks above. Before and behind, all round, can be heard a constant fire from the guns, as if an enemy's skirmishers had invaded the thickets: in one sheltered corner a dog sits up with lolling tongue and panting sides; close by, an empty stone jar against a huddled heap of shining plumage, the silver fur of the rabbits, no longer a warm brown, and the opal tints of the wood-pigeons. Up on the summit is an open field of turnips, which we cross in a serried line, driving the pheasants before us towards a dark belt of pines, where there is a mournful murmur, though the blazing woods lie peacefully still. As the line wheels round, facing downwards, there presents itself such a smiling panorama as is seldom seen. Right in front, belted on three sides by the forest, lies a noble house with down-trending lawns; behind, hills rise; and away in the uttermost distance, a sharp craggy peak—a misty glimpse of the Cleve Hills; sharp to the left, the Black Mountains, ridged and furrowed with white lines, which lines are nothing else but snow. Along the centre of the range, a storm is raging—a heavy white cloud, black as ink at the base, as it sweeps grandly along; before it is a dark shadow; behind, following in its track, the sun lightens crag

after crag, even to the valley below us, as the shadows pass across the open champaign. Far to the right rise the Malvern range; and apparently almost at their feet, so deceptive is distance, the cathedral tower and church pinnacles of Hereford shoot up like gray needles in the clear air. The pines murmur behind; the light beyond shines dimly through the purple haze there always is in the pinewoods, where the ground ashes and underwood are cut, and piles of fagots stand; where we walk upon sweet, fresh, smelling cones, and woodchips ankle deep. A fragment from the great storm upon the mountains yonder has been torn away, and come rushing across the valley, blotting out wood and pasture, where the dogs are driving the sheep home, and the distant ploughmen crawl like pigmies. Overhead, the firs toss and moan; a touch of sleet strikes coldly on the face, and everything is lost in the drenching blast. Presently, the light struggles through again, the thunder of the rain ceases, and the colours seem to have brightened, as under a new varnish marvellously prepared.

In these pinewoods, filled with the blue haze, trunks where the trees have once been 'felled,' have rotted, and thrown up a new vegetable growth—giant fungi with a covering like leather in toughness and texture, some of them soft to the touch and large as a lady's umbrella; others with a fibre strong enough to resist a stout blow. They are much finer in quality than those grown in the open, but they derive no warmth from the sunshine, so they lack the belted zones and vividness of colour peculiar to their fellows of the fields. In the semi-darkness, the birds fly over our heads untouched—there is no light to shoot. From the boundary-line of the firs, down nearly a quarter of a mile below, is a natural avenue, formed of hazel wands and trailing verdure; a green alley, filled with a dim semi-tone of refracted light, almost like a visible darkness. Against this is the outer boundary of the woods, where we take our stand in an orchard for a final battue. Here, by reason of its being a shaded hollow, perhaps, the grass is green; the apple boughs still lie under their russet coat; the fruit gleams gold and waxen, streaked and varnished red against the background. Some fern-leaves, the fronds hardly yet uncurled, peer out of the hedgerows; a late harebell or two, and some blue dog-violets without smell or fragrance. Against the wood, a belt of gleaming holly shines, every leaf lustrous, a prodigal waste of berries like points of sealing-wax against the everlasting though sombre green. It is getting dark now; there is a salmon-hued flush in the west, where the sun shines over the dismantled tree-tops; but the loud whirl of pinions tells us where the birds are, as they slide out of cover into the open on wings of wind. There is a quivering hum in the air, the hollow grate a pheasant's wings will make as they come sailing over one by one; a quick bang, bang, bang! in this warm corner, a puff of feathers falling like coloured snow, till, presently, a beater's head appears behind the hollies, and the last untouched bird goes humming, with his whistle going, across the apple trees. A few pigeons wheel in and out; a few more shots are fired; the keeper's whistle sounds by the woodman's cottage, answered by many

shrill signals; the dogs throw themselves upon their haunches; one by one we fall in together. A goodly heap of slain—twenty brace of pheasants, a half-score of rabbits, and a leash of pigeons; and as yet the burnt foliage is on the trees, the oaks are thick with leaves, and the larches form a cover almost impenetrable. Velvetene is satisfied.

As night drops upon us like a pall, there is no mist coming up from the east as the sea-fog rolls in with the tide; no promise of hazy mornings any more, with the sun-tinted mirage of the afternoons. The wind dies in short puffs; a keen shrewd air blowing the haze away, and disclosing, with a gradually increasing complement, a million frosty stars. You can feel the frost upon cheek and brow; but no man should venture to say what of the morrow, for it might vary from one more touch of Indian summer, a day of infinite calm in the blazing woods, and sunshine in the hollows; or, again, there might be the thundering blast of the morning, with the sheeted rain like a liquid wall on the fallows, and the gulls driven landward from the sea. Then shall the conflagration of the woods have burnt to the last fibre, and the red flush die to ashes, the sombre livery of a turgid December gray. But to-day they burn with a luminous shine; and the apple-racks are waiting for the ripening fruit. But a nation has died in a day before this, and nature only dies for a season; so long as her forehead is wreathed with the grape, and her face ruddy with harvest promise, we care not to see the yellow rottenness of the side which faces farthest from the generous sun.

RICHARD CABLE,

THE LIGHTSHIPMAN.

CHAPTER LVII.—THE FOUNDATION.

RICHARD CABLE scarcely slept all night. He thought of many things. He thought of what he had seen and overheard at Pentargon. He saw in the darkness the arms of his child round the neck, interlaced with the hair, of Josephine, her head tied up in his blue, white-spotted kerchief, lying on her shoulder, looking up into the pale face of her nurse, with a soul of love and forgiveness streaming out of those blue eyes. But he thought of something beside—of the plan he had made for Mary; and he was by no means sure that she would be well content with the arrangement. One circumstance had, however, occurred to make his way easier. When a young man has been refused, his self-love receives a wound more severe than his heart, and he is then impelled to do some act which will retrieve his lost self-respect. A man who has been refused, or jilted, is ready to propose to the next girl he sees; and no sooner was Walter Penrose aware that his suit for Mary Cable was unacceptable, than he offered himself to Sarah Jones. He did not care particularly for Sarah; but he did not choose to have it thought in the place that he was a rejected lover; and he did not choose

that the Cables should consider him as insoluble. As this engagement was hurried, the wedding was also hurried; Sarah Jones had no desire to let Walter slip through her fingers by delay, and Walter wished to have his fate settled irrevocably as speedily as possible, out of defiance to the Cables, who had slighted his pretensions.

After breakfast one morning, Richard Cable said to Mary: 'Child, when you have cleared away, come to me into the summer-house; I have a word to say to you of some importance.'

'Father, I hear the bishop arrives to-morrow.'

'Yes; but I am not going to speak to you about the bishop.'

'And the confirmation is on Friday.'

'Yes; I suppose so; but that is not the matter.'

He saw her and Martha exchange looks. Martha put up her lip and looked sulky. Martha had inherited her father's stubbornness. She and Mary clung to each other, as the twins who intervened between Mary and her were fast friends and inseparable. Martha looked up to Mary with passionate love, regarded her as the most beautiful and perfect girl in the world; fought her battles, resented every slight shown her, or supposed slight, as she would bridle with pride and pleasure at every acknowledgment of her sister's excellence.

Cable went to his summer-house and smoked a pipe. Before he had finished it, he heard a timid foot on the gravel, and in another moment Mary stood in the open door.

'Come in,' said Cable.—'What is the matter? Upset because you have broken a plate? Bah! Fourpence will set that to rights.—Come inside, Mary dear; I must have a serious word with you.'

She entered, trembling, and with changing colour, changing as fast as the flushes in the evening clouds. Tears sparkled on her eyelashes, as raindrops on fern-leaves in the hedges at morn.

'What is the matter, child? Why are you frightened? Your father will never do anything to displease you. You can rely on that. His whole care is for your happiness, and it is for your happiness that he is now arranging.'

She raised her blue eyes; they were swimming with tears, so full of tears that he could not read through the watery veil what they said. He could not say for a moment any more. His pipe did not draw as it should; he unscrewed it, and blew through the nozzle. His blood throbbed in his temples. He was vexed with his mother because she had refused to speak to Mary about his purpose, and relieve him of the irksome obligation. 'Mary,' he said, after a long pause, during which she stood before him with folded hands and lowered eyes—'Mary, I suppose you have formed a rough guess what my business is with you?'

She made no answer with her lips. Had he looked up, he might have read the reply in the pain-twitching lips of his child and in her shifting colour.

'Can you give a guess at what I have to say?'

Then she held up her head, looked full through her tears in her father's face, and answered: 'Yes,

dear father, I know—I can guess what you want to—say. But—O father! father dearest—spare me this time—do not say it.’

‘Spare you this time?’ echoed Cable. ‘What is the meaning of these words? When have I not been considerate and kind to you—to you above the rest?’

No answer.

He waited; but as he received no reply, without looking in her face, he began again: ‘Mary.’

‘Father,’ she said, ‘let me’— But her voice failed her, and she put her hands over her eyes.

‘You do not know what is good for you, my child,’ he said. ‘You are indeed still very young, scarcely eighteen, and yet— But never mind; your mother was married early. If I have doubted for a moment whether I acted rightly on a former occasion, my doubts have vanished to-day. That young fellow, who once took a fancy to you, is now— Hark!’

At that moment the bells of the parish church began a glad peal. The wedding service was over that united Walter Penrose with Sarah Jones, and the ringers were sending the welcome from the church tower.

Then Mary raised her hands, clasped them over her head, uttering a piercing cry, and sank at her father’s feet: ‘Father! O my father! you have killed me!’

Cable caught her, and tried to raise her; but she twisted herself from his hands, and on her knees staggered round the summer-house, clasping her ears, to shut out the reverberation of the wedding bells.

Cable went after her; he caught her in his arms and held her; but she slipped down on the floor again and lay her length on it, beating the floor with her head, as one mad, and then scrambling up on her knees and throwing herself in a heap in the corner. ‘O father! my father!’ she cried, ‘this is your doing! Walter does not love any one but me; and I—I love, and can love none other. I shall never, never marry now! You have made me miserable—you have broken my heart.’

Richard Cable was as a man turned to stone. He could not speak; he tried, but his voice failed. He put his hand to his brow, and a deep groan escaped his breast. All at once he stood up; he could not breathe in the summer-house. He was stunned by the reverberation of those St Kerian bells, beating in upon his brain, from all the eight sides of his wooden house. He left Mary kneeling on the ground; he rushed forth. He opened his gate and hobbled down the road. He could not bear to face his children. He did not feel the ground under his feet; he was like a dreamer, falling, falling, touching nothing. The birds sang in the bushes, the holly leaves reflected the sun from their shining leaves on the hedge. Everything swam about him. He could not run because of his thigh, and he had not his stick, so he went painfully, lurching like a drunken man. He had pierced his best loved daughter’s heart; he had robbed her of her happiness, alienated her from him for ever—he had laid the foundation in his first-born.

‘Whither was he going? He did not know himself. He wanted to be away from Red Windows, somewhere out of the sound of Mary’s

sobs, away from the reproachful eyes of her sisters; somewhere where he might be alone in his misery. There was one spot to which instinctively he gravitated—the old cob cottage. He did not consider that it had been given up to Josephine, or if he thought of that, he remembered she was away, and that, though she dwelt in it, it was now vacant. He did not rest till he reached it. The key was kept in the same secret place, the hole in the thatch, and when he put his hand there, he found the key. He opened the door and went in. He did not look about him; he saw the old armchair in the old place, and the table and the seven stools. The hearth was cold; the room was still, only a few flies humming in it. There were a few trifles that belonged to Josephine on the chimney-shelf and on the table; and to a crook in the ceiling hung a bunch of pink everlastings, head downward. He threw himself into the old chair and folded his arms on his knees, and laid his head on his arms and wept.

How long he sat there he did not know; thoughts hot as molten metal flowed white and glaring through his brain. Had he been happy in Red Windows? Was he not more miserable in his wealth than he had been in his poverty? What had his money done for him but steal his children’s hearts from him, and seal up his perception of what was for their welfare? There, round the table, were the stools of his children, on which they had sat as little things and eaten their frugal meals. How much better they had tasted seasoned with love, than the richer repasts at Red Windows strewn with verjuice.

Those bells! Those wedding bells were still ringing! Oh, what a happy day for him, had they rung for Mary’s wedding! How content he might have been with her down in St Kerian, near the smithy. Then every day he would have strolled into the village to see her and talk with the smith, his son-in-law. Now that was over. Mary’s heart was broken. The bright future of the dearest being he loved had been dashed to pieces by his hand. Could she ever forgive him—him who had spoiled her entire future, blighted her whole life? How could he live in the same house with her whose happiness he had wrecked?

Then he remembered what he had witnessed on the cliff behind the *Maggie*—he saw again the little head bound up in his blue kerchief, resting on Josephine’s shoulder, looking up into her face, and saying: ‘I am glad it was you, and I love you a thousand times better!’

O wondrous beauty of forgiveness! St Luke’s summer in the moral world, when a soft glory illumines the fading leaves and drooping vegetation, and makes the touch of decay and death seem the touch of perfect loveliness.

What was the worm at the root of all Cable’s happiness, that which had robbed him his successes of satisfaction? Was it not the bitterness with which he had thought of Josephine, the savage determination with which he had stamped out every spark of relenting love that had for a moment twinkled in his gloomy heart?

As he thus thought, he groaned. Then, suddenly, he was roused and touched by a hand. He looked up, bewildered. Jacob Corye the inn-keeper stood before him with agitated, mottled face.

'You've heard it? It is true! We are all done for.'

Cable could not collect his senses at first.

'I came over at once, the moment the news reached me. I went up to Red Windows. Then I heard you had gone down lane. Some one saw you come on here. I followed.—Is it true? Tell me what you have heard. My God! this is frightful!'

'I do not understand you.'

'The Duchy Bank has failed—stopped payment. I had three thousand five hundred pounds in it. And you?'

'Everything,' answered Cable.

'Just heard it. Could hardly believe it. I came over here. It is a frightful loss to me. Three thousand five hundred pounds! Why, I can never start the *Champagne Air Hotel*.'

'It is my ruin,' said Cable. 'I owe money for Red Windows, and I have put my savings into shares in the bank as portions for my girls.' He put his hands over his brow and laughed fiercely. 'Naked came I into the world, and naked I shall go out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; but I cannot and I will not say, Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

'Three thousand five hundred pounds!' groaned Corye. 'That takes pints of blood out of one's veins.'

'I am bled to death,' said Cable.

'Look here! What will become of Red Windows?'

'It will be sold over my head. I have not paid off; and I am a shareholder.'

'You have everything in the bank?'

'Every penny.'

'Look here, Uncle Dick,' said Corye. 'Under these circumstances, we must give up the *Champagne Air Hotel*.'

'Yes.'

'And we must think no more of mating my Joshua and your Mary.'

'That is past,' said Cable.

'Three thousand five hundred pounds!' groaned Jacob. '—Well, I pity you. I can feel. I am cruel badly bitten.' Then he went away.

Richard Cable remained in the same position and in the same place. He did not return to Red Windows for his dinner. He sat, stunned with despair, rocking himself in his armchair, looking upon the white ashes of his first life, and the ashes of his second life. His first ambition had been realised, and had turned to dust when he grasped it. The second had been realised, and had failed him also. What was done could not be undone. He must return with his daughters to the poor cob cottage. The wealth was gone as a dream—not a happy dream—a dream of disappointed ambition, of pride unsatisfied. It would have been better for him and his children if he had never left his stone-breaking, never separated himself from them. That episode of prosperity, like the episode of marriage with Josephine, had done nothing for him except unfit him for the life he had been accustomed to lead. He felt inclined in his misery to take his stone-breaker's hammer and break his daughters' hearts with it, one after another, and then die himself. Red Windows must be abandoned, and they must all accommodate themselves as best they could to the cottage, and cultivate again

the three-cornered garden; and he must go along his rounds with the van of calves and droves of young stock, rebuilding slowly his broken-down fortune.

'Cursed be the day,' muttered Cable, 'that ever I dreamed that daring dream!'

His head was burning. He could not weep now; his eyes were fireballs. The fountain of tears in his heart was dry as an old cistern, and nothing lay at the bottom but grit and canker. One thing that embittered his misfortune most of all to him was the thought of how the St Kerian folk, whom he had held aloof from, would rejoice over his misfortune. Those who had most fawned on him in his prosperity would now turn their heel upon him. How Penrose the blacksmith that day would laugh over his ill-luck, and bless his stars that his Walter had escaped union with one whom misfortune followed! How Tregurtha, from whom he had purchased Summerlease, would rub his hands, and vow that the day had now come which he had long foretold, when Uncle Dick's pride would be brought low!

Then the strength of Richard Cable's character began to manifest itself again, as these galling visions presented themselves before him. It was true that he was a ruined man; but he had still the brains and the skill to make a new fortune by following the same course he had already pursued. As he began to think of the future, the present lost its intensity of bitterness. He felt that he still had in him sufficient energy to begin life for the third time; but he was shaken, and he could never hope to recover all that was now taken from him. There were other competitors stepping in where he had shown the way.

Whilst thus thinking, he heard the door open, and the blacksmith, Penrose, came in. 'Well, Uncle Dicky,' said the smith, 'what be this bad news I've heard? The Duchy Bank gone scatt [broken] and all your savings lost?'

Cable nodded and sighed.

'Bless me,' said Penrose, 'that's a bad lookout for you. Have you nothing laid by elsewhere?'

Cable shook his head.

'By the powers!' said the blacksmith, 'I'm mighty sorry for you. I've been at the wedding of my boy, and I'm only sorry he weren't spliced to the other one. Your Mary would have suited me better than Sarah Jones. But it was not to be; so let the past lie covered with leaves. Sarah Jones brings some money with her; but she has a shrewish temper, if what folks say be true. I'd rather have had your Mary without a penny than Sarah with all her brass.—But there! what is done is done, and to-day the parson has hammered them together on the anvil, and there'll be no parting after that, whether they agree or not. As for her sharp tongue, he must learn to put up with it and turn its point with gentleness.'

Cable sighed, and thought of his marriage with Josephine.

'Well, Uncle Dick,' continued Penrose, 'I've just seen Jacob Corye, who is badly hit. But he says you are worse bitten than he, and that there was nothing left for you and your maidens but the workhouse.'

Cable looked up, ironically, and said: 'No, not that.'

'No,' pursued the blacksmith; 'I knew it

could not be so bad as that. Still, I thought I'd come on and see.—Corye said you were here taking on dreadfully about your loss, and like to do yourself an injury. Then an idea came into my head; it flashed up like a spark on red-hot iron. I came on, and here I find you.'

'Yes,' said Cable, 'here you find me.' He was not angry with Penrose for his intrusion. He felt that it was kindly meant, and the sympathy of the blacksmith touched him.

'Now, harky' to me,' said the blacksmith, lowering his voice. 'I know you well enough—a straight man as ever was. I reckon I'm a straight man too; and where I'm crooked, may God Almighty hammer me out of my crookedness with the hammer of adversity, straight again! But there—I've come to say that I've a matter of a couple of hundred pounds lying idle—thank heaven, not in a bank, but in my old woman's nightcap, and stuffed up the chimney in our bedroom—all in gold, and you're heartily welcome to the loan of it as long as you like. You leave this door unlocked to-night, and I'll come along as if I were out to smoke, and blow off the drink I've had to take because of all the toasts and well-wishings, being my son's wedding day; and I'll come in here, nobody seeing, and I'll put the old woman's nightcap and its contents into thicky [yonder] oven, where you'll find it to-morrow morning, and nobody the wiser.—No words,' said Penrose, starting up. 'I reckon I hear steps coming. I'm wanted because the young people are off.'

Before Cable could recover his speech, for moved to the loss of words he was, Penrose was gone. At the same moment in came three other men, Tregurtha the farmer, Bonithon the saddler, and Hoskins the miller. Each looked at his fellow to speak. Tregurtha, nudged by the saddler and the miller, after a few ineffectual whispered remonstrances, came sheepishly forward. 'You're in the old nest again, Uncle Dicky,' he began, then coughed. 'Us three chaps were in the *Silver Bowl* just now, when Jacob Corye came, mighty took-on about the loss of his money through the break of the Duchy Bank. He told us as how you had lost everything—as you'd put all the fortune you had into the Duchy, and took it out of calves and bullocks. I reckon it were a mistake. Keep your money in flesh, say I. I once lost a power of money in law. I never went to law again after that. It taught me a lesson, and I've profited by it. That is why I've money now. You may lose a calf here or a cow there of milk-fever, or a horse with the glands, or a pig with the measles—and talking of that, my wife's cruel bad wi' erysipelas—but you've other things to fall back on. It is not so with a bank; that's like the bridge in the nursery story, which when it bended, there the story ended. Well, old friend, we—that is, Ephraim Bonithon, and Tony Hoskins, and I, was very troubled when we heard you had got pixy-led in Queer Lane; so, when Corye was gone, we put our heads together. Now, us three—that's Tony Hoskins, and Ephraim Bonithon, and I—have all of us got money laid by, are warmish men in our way—the thermometer in us don't go down to zero. So we've come to say, if you want to get on in the cattle business and are pinched to start with again, we three—

that is to say, me, and Ephraim Bonithon, and Tony Hoskins—be ready to stand security for you to any sum in reason that you like to name. —And,' continued Tregurtha, 'don't you never go for to think and suppose of selling Red Windows. Us of St Kerian be proud of that house standing up above the town, and us shows it to the little uns as a visible lesson to 'em of what uprightness and energy and perseverance may perform. Moreover—and besides'—he took breath after this word—'us three men, the afore-in-mentioned Tony Hoskins, and me, and Ephraim Bonithon, can't abear to think of them seven shining and adorning beauties, your sweet maidens, God bless 'em! should not be housed in a nest worthy of such treasures. Then therefore and because'—another long breath—'if the creditors dare to sell that there house over your head, then we three—that is, Ephraim Bonithon, Tony Hoskins, and I, say—confound their eyes! And we'll buy the house and make it over to you, to repay us as you earn the money.' Then he drew a long breath and said 'There!' and the other two drew the backs of their hands across their noses and grunted 'There!'

Then suddenly, panting, in the doorway stood little Lettice, who cried: 'O father! come, come quick! Who do you think is come to Red Windows? The bishop and Mrs Sellwood; and they say they are old friends of yours; and want to see you and us all—and are asking after little Bessie.—And,' after panting a while, 'the bishop has brought a to-day's paper from Launceston, and he says it's all a parcel of lies about the Duchy Bank; it's the other bank, the name I can't call to mind, is broken, and not the Duchy.'

Then Richard Cable held out his hands and clasped and shook those of Ephraim Bonithon, William Tregurtha, and Anthony Hoskins, shook and squeezed them, but said nothing; yet, as he hurried away, his body shook, and his breast heaved convulsively, and sounds issued from his mouth, that made Tregurtha say: 'By George, he is pleased—how he is laughing!'

But Lettice, looking up in her father's face as she ran at his side, asked: 'Papa, why are you crying?'

Then he said in a choking voice: 'Run, Lettice—run after Mr Corye, and tell him not to fail to send little Bessie and—her who is with Bessie, in his gig, to Red Windows, to-morrow.'

SALT-MANUFACTURE IN INDIA.

THE tax or duty on common salt, or what is chemically known as sodium chloride, forms not only one of the main sources of the revenue of British India, but the manufacture and sale of the commodity itself, constituting one of the great government monopolies, give work to thousands of both Europeans and natives, under a separate department of the State, embracing a comprehensive machinery for the supervision of the industry, and prevention of contraband practices throughout the country. The vast extent of coast-line, with extensive estuaries and connected lagoons carrying the briny fluid of the surrounding ocean far inland, the excessive heat and dry parching land—

winds that prevail during the summer months, lend special advantages to the manufacture of salt from sea-water by solar evaporation; and ordinary cultivation ceasing when it is sufficiently warm for salt-manufacture to commence, such native labour as is necessary for its actual manipulation is readily obtained at a very moderate cost, rendering the value of the manufactured article so trifling, that even with the additional percentage tacked on by the government before sale, all imports of it are easily kept out of the local markets.

The sites taken up by salt-works, chiefly barren wastes where nothing else will grow, are situated either close to the estuaries through which they draw their supplies of salt water direct from the sea during spring-tides, or on swamps largely impregnated with natural saline deposits, where pits being sunk, the necessary requirements are met by percolation in subsoil brine. The usual practice is to farm out such land, free of all rates, to suitable persons, who supply the labour, and manufacture the article under government superintendence, receiving in return a fixed rate per ton for all approved salt made by them and delivered into store within a given time.

The works, extending from fifty to a hundred acres in area, are divided into beds, varying in size from ten by fifteen to thirty feet or so square, partitioned off by irrigation channels, along which the water is passed from one to another, and small embankments a foot in height, the larger divisions being utilised as 'condensers,' or wide shallow expanses for evaporating purposes; while the smaller ones, more easily got at, are reserved for crystallising the salt in.

The system of manufacture in India differs considerably from that of other countries in the separation of the various saline ingredients held in solution in sea-water, the ordinary composition of the latter being about 96.5 per cent. of pure water to 3.5 per cent. of various salts, principally sodium chloride. Work commences soon after the cessation of the annual tropical rains or monsoon, all the beds being first flooded with salt water. Thus thoroughly saturated and cemented, they are then carefully levelled and hardened by being beaten down repeatedly with heavy oblong logs of wood, those intended for crystallising in being further closely stamped by the feet of the workers; and the surface soil of stiff clay soon becomes impermeable, and a day's exposure to the sun renders the beds fit for use.

The condensers being divided into three series, the first or primary lot are next filled with salt water to a depth of six inches, and left to evaporate, being added to from time to time for maintenance of the original depth; and as the liquid gains in specific gravity, or becomes denser, Baumé's hydrometer is applied, and the brine soon marks ten degrees of density, when it is passed on to a secondary set, those emptied being refilled. From the secondary set, the heavily laden

liquid is allowed to gravitate, in due course, into a third or finishing set of condensers. And on marking twenty-five degrees, the brine is ready for the crystallising beds; all organic matter and the less soluble salts held by the water in the first instance having been deposited on its way as evaporation progressed, and the only salts now held in suspension being sodium chloride (common salt), with a small quantity of magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts), and traces of inorganic matter, magnesium chloride and calcium (lime)—the process up to this stage taking about three weeks, the original density of sea-water by Baumé's hydrometer being 2.5 degrees, subsoil brine sometimes marking five degrees at start.

There are now two methods of allowing the formation and collection of common salt—the rapid and accretion systems. In the first, the 'saturated brine' from the finishing condensers is run in to the crystallising beds, where sodium chloride at once begins to separate from the liquid, and crystallises on the floor; and by the third day, under favourable circumstances, all the pure salt has been deposited in a white sheet of opaque crystals, and Epsom salts is ready to solidify, the hydrometer now showing thirty degrees of density, and the remaining liquor, called 'bitters,' from its particularly acrid taste, containing hardly any perceptible trace of common salt. The salt formed on the floor is next gathered up with flat wooden rakes, drained, and stored; a further supply of saturated brine again passed into the crystallising beds, and the same process followed, till, after the third gathering or scraping, the bitters is got rid of, and the crystallising beds remade as before; the same procedure, as far as they are concerned, gone through *ab initio*, till the annual rains again set in, the periods varying according to locality.

In the accretion system, the only difference is, that on the brine in the crystallising beds rising to thirty degrees, instead of removing the salt already formed, a fresh supply of saturated brine is let in over it every third day or so for three weeks, the salt allowed to form in layers to the thickness of from three to six inches, and then removed by the hand, the bitters being subsequently run off and the beds remade as before. In some works, the salt is raked through as it forms, and turned out in hard half-inch opaque cubes. Though of a better quality, it does not generally meet with much demand.

In addition to works proper, such as the above, shallow lakes with loamy or clay beds, communicating with the sea at spring-tides, are also utilised for salt formation. The lake being filled early in the season, the water is left to evaporate, and the various salts allowed to separate in layers; and on the remaining liquid rising to thirty degrees of density by Baumé's hydrometer, the top layer, or that of common salt, is dug out with pick and spade. This can hardly be

called manufacture, though it must be admitted that, requiring less labour and trouble, it naturally recommends itself; but then it must be remembered that facilities for this mode of making salt are not everywhere to be found, and one of the two systems of manufacture has to be resorted to where other difficulties are not present.

Much might be said of the relative advantages of either system; but the outturn of salt from a given area under each being about the same, and owing to the anomaly of the salt being sold by the government in weight and retailed in measure by the dealers, the salt showing most bulk is more sought after; and in the rapid system, this purpose is answered, as, not being allowed sufficient time to thoroughly crystallise, or being, so to speak, forced, the cubes of salt are imperfectly formed and hollow. As it takes a larger quantity to make up an equal weight, and the general Indian consumer not being particular as to quality so long as it is made up in quantity, the rapid system is consequently more in vogue.

On the eastern coast, the manufactured article is next stored on raised platforms in pyramidal heaps of about 132·25 tons each, covered over for protection from damp and rain with twelve inches of clay or thatch; while on the western coast, the annual rains being heavier, rough water-tight sheds are used instead, from which the daily sales are made as required.

The average labour required is one man per acre of land under manufacture for six months, the outturn of salt from the same area being about seventy-two tons per annum, costing when stored about 4s. 4½d. per ton, and sold by the government at 7s. 9½d., plus a duty, which varies generally as the Indian budget shows a surplus or deficit, and is at present fixed at £3, 2s. 6½d. per ton. (The rupee is calculated at 1s. 6d.) To this of course have to be added the dealer's profit and cost of carriage, which very considerably enhance its value to the consumer, especially in the interior.

The heavy duty on this important necessary to health, and therefore of life, constitutes one of the great grievances of the poorer classes, who, with salt forming spontaneously in the estuaries at their very doors, or easily separated from the soil round their houses, consider it, and not without some reason, specially unjust that they are not permitted to help themselves from nature's supplies, and so have recourse to every means of avoiding the duty, necessitating the employment of a large preventive agency to protect the revenue.

The imposition of the duty is defended as being the only direct tax that touches all classes, and the only tribute paid by the poorer section, or the masses generally, for the many advantages the better-to-do orders pay for in the various assessments imposed upon them. But the justice of taxing such a commodity is of course open to very grave question. Not only does salt answer the greater uses required of it, but from it are made, either in the rough crystalline formation or in a more alabaster-like style, the much-admired ornamental crosses, trays, and vases, samples of which were to be seen in the Indian Court of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition. Once made, the articles are easily coloured or

polished, but of course, being of such deliquescent material, are soon affected by the weather, and have to be kept perfectly free from damp or other moisture.

THE OLD SECRETAIRE.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

CHAPTER III.

LIKE most men of his profession, Warren was a keen observer of character; a mystery delighted him equally from a business or an analytical point of view. Here, then, were all the elements for a seasonable romance—a Haunted Chamber; a mysterious servitor of the good old orthodox type, moreover the only living historian of the tragedy—a trusted servant, who had actually a personal acquaintance, so to speak, with Edgar Warren, and who alone—Warren was sure of that—could solve a dark and blood-stained catastrophe.

Morning broke with snow knee-deep in the drive, huge drifts half-way up the windows, and no prospect of any outdoor amusement. Even the rural postman had not succeeded in forcing his way through. It was, as Constance Lumley observed, when the parliament had gathered round the hall fire, a Christmas evidently to be spent quite magazine-artificially. With nothing whatever to do, and no immediate prospect of amusement, conversation began to languish, till one of the party entered with the startling news that the ghost-light had been seen burning in the haunted wing all the previous night. Thereupon, the listeners began to thrill, and a new zest was given to the flagging flow of talk.

'Christmas Eve, the anniversary of the tragedy,' Ada Secretan exclaimed. 'I had forgotten that. To-night, the ghost walks, rapier in hand, down the dusky passage. Shall we interview him?'

But in spite of nineteenth-century civilisation and the boldness of numbers and daylight, there was no enthusiastic response to this appeal, for each looked at his neighbour, waiting for him to speak.

'Haunted Chamber or not, this is the very morning to explore those old rooms,' Walter Secretan remarked. 'What do you say to us all going?—only you girls had better put on some wraps, for it is sure to be dirty enough. Those in favour of my motion, please hold up their hands.'

Immediately, a host of fair fingers were extended; and the proposal being carried *nem. con.*, the ladies trooped away to prepare themselves for the coming excursion. As they began to reappear one by one, cloaked and hooded, Warren and Walter Secretan returned in rough laced jackets, bearing between them a gigantic bunch of rusty keys, a small but powerful crowbar, and a dark-lantern.

A short walk along a broad flagged passage brought the sightseers to a flight of steps surmounted by a wide oak door, fitted with long iron hinges, rusty and timeworn, but still forming a powerful barrier against intruders. After some difficulty, a key was found to fit, and the creaking lock forced back by the united strength of Secretan and Warren. The bolts were drawn; but the great iron hinges held, till the crowbar being brought into requisition, finally the great

door flew open with a sullen bang that seemed to re-echo moodily down the dim reverberating passages.

A low corridor was before them, hung with ancient tapestry, torn and moth-eaten, and swaying in ghostly fashion before the cold air. Thick dust lay upon the tiled floor, deadening the sound of footsteps. Still the light of the lantern was enough to guide their somewhat hesitating steps, till at length a hall was reached, in the centre of which was a noble staircase, lighted from the roof by a glass dome, though the accumulated dust of more than half a century made daylight dim and pallid. Here every step echoed loudly; every vibration of the voice seemed to ring as if the place was filled with mocking spirits. With some difficulty they flung back the ponderous iron-lined shutters, and a stream of light poured in. There were rusty-armour figures in dim corners; pictures peeling slowly from their panels on the walls; a colony of rats scudded noisily across the floor under the rotting wainscot. There were three rooms leading out of the hall, the doors of which they had no difficulty in opening—rooms in which old oak furniture had been placed, though the damask had mouldered and left the frames bare. There was nothing of interest in any of these apartments, save one or two curious ornaments; and upon one dusty table, a pack of cards lay strewn, with a decanter and glass, the former containing a pungent sediment.

Up-stairs was a long corridor containing many rooms, all of which they explored; and here the girls found themselves in their element. There were wardrobes and huge linen-chests containing lace in abundance; tarnished silver buckles and rich brocades; lustrings stiff as cardboard; a rich treasure of silk and velvet enough, more than enough, of dresses from the time of the 'merrie monarch' downwards, to furnish material for a hundred ancient comedies. The fair bevy of connoisseurs drew a breath of mingled delight and envy, when this rich harvest had been gathered into a shimmering heap.

They had drawn apart by ones and twos, each of the party pouring over some newly discovered treasure, as the boxes were turned out promiscuously on the floor. Point-lace collars and paste buckles, a heavy garnet signet ring, some delicate cameos, silken hose, and claret-coloured full-bottomed coats slashed with silk—every article of clothing affected by a lost generation was there.

'You don't deserve a shred of these beautiful things, Ada,' exclaimed Althea Wynne, drawing a long breath of unalloyed admiration. 'Fancy allowing all these treasures to moulder here for years and years!'

"O'er all, there hung the shadow of a fear," Warren quoted.—'Miss Wynne, I am afraid you are a Radical—you cannot understand the reverence due to one's ancestors.—And now, confess, Miss Secretan, have you not been just a little afraid to ransack these sacred apartments?'

'A little, perhaps,' Ada confessed. 'I almost feel guilty of sacrilege now. What do you say to carrying our spoils away? I think we have done enough.'

'Without invading the sanctity of the ghostly chamber!' cried Miss Lumley. 'Perish the thought!—Mr Secretan, lead the way!'

But here the first difficulty arose. No one

knew sufficiently the geography of the rooms, to point out the mystic apartment. All Secretan knew was, that the chamber looked out upon a green courtyard facing the east wing, and that it was lighted by an oriel window. At the end of the corridor the explorers found another room facing them, which, after a little cogitation and some speculation as to their exact latitude, Warren declared must be the place of their search. To their surprise, they found this door barred with iron let into the solid masonry, so strongly, indeed, that half an hour's exertion at least was required before they could wrench away sufficient of the barriers to try the key. At this critical moment, swift footsteps came unheeded towards the eager group, and Warren felt himself dashed aside with a force scarcely credible in the feeble frame of the intruder. 'Hold, hold, I say! Have you no reverence for the dead?'

Silas Brookes was standing with his back to the door, a flashing rapier in his hand. He seemed to have thrown off half a century of years; his figure, no longer bent and halting, was drawn up to its full height; a bright colour gave an air of youth to the shrivelled cheek; his keen eyes flashed with all the fire and brilliancy of perfect manhood. For a few moments the group started back in some alarm, and not a little fright amongst the girls, who clung to each other in unaffected fear.

'What is the meaning of this folly?' Secretan demanded, the first to recover himself. 'Brookes, you forget yourself. Go back into the house immediately, or we shall know how to treat you. You are alarming the ladies by this conduct.'

But the words might have fallen on ears of stone. The old man stood with one hand behind him, as if protecting some unseen treasure, the other held forward the rapier, prepared to pierce the first intruder.

'Shall we make a rush for him?' Warren whispered, his blood up by this time. 'We could easily overpower him between us.'

'Think of the girls,' Secretan replied between his teeth. 'I am afraid we shall have to beat an ignominious retreat. Confound it! this comes of keeping a madman on the premises; and yet I don't like to give in.'

Warren for reply was about to advocate extreme measures, when a happy thought struck him. After all, the situation had its ludicrous aspect; but he was too intent on his new plan to see this now. He whispered a few words in his friend's ear to the effect that he was to get the party away, and leave him to face the strange custodian of the Haunted Chamber.

'You have some scheme in your head?' Walter asked.

Warren nodded. He had a scheme, though it had scarcely taken shape as yet. Nevertheless, it was with a certain feeling of relief that he heard the echoing footsteps of his party dying away in the distance. Then he turned a pair of fearless gray eyes full upon the guardian, standing in the same watching attitude, and commanded him to lay aside his weapon. Brookes threw the rapier on the stone floor with a resounding crash.

It was an hour later before Warren stepped into the hall again, where he found the late adventure still being discussed by a batch of tongues. But

if they expected any story of wild adventure, to hear the history of some gruesome tragedy or hidden treasure, they were mistaken. He simply pointed out to them the fact that the old servant was not so much to blame for his conduct as they thought; but that it was more their fault, the simple fact being that the faithful valet was aghast at the idea of the room sacred to his beloved and revered master being given over to ruthless plunderers. Indeed, so smoothly did the wily dramatist put the case, that public opinion, which had been strongly against the obstreperous Brookes, rapidly veered round in his favour, till some of the actors in this affecting little comedy began to feel somewhat ashamed of the part they had played.

'Poor old man!' said Edith Lucas pityingly; 'and all this time we have been accounting him a dangerous madman. I'm so glad!'

Warren smiled under his moustache; and Walter Secretan, turning towards him, caught the look of amusement in his friend's eyes. Presently, under cover of the conversation, he got alongside him, and in a cautious whisper, demanded an account of the interview.

'Too long to tell you now,' Warren murmured. 'Only, if that old gentleman is mad, there is method in his madness.—Wait in the dining-room after dinner till the rest have gone, and I will tell you my plan.'

They had some time to wait, for it being Christmas Eve, the meal was a long and elaborate affair. It was nearly ten before the last *frou-frou* of skirts announced the disappearance of the ladies, and nearly half an hour later before the Squire and Colonel Lucas sought the drawing-room with many a sly allusion and bald platitude concerning the want of gallantry of the present generation. Walter closed the door behind them with a parting shot, and taking a cigarette from his case, composed himself to listen to Warren's plan of campaign.

'Did it ever strike you what a fine place this west wing would be for a gang of smugglers or coiners?' Warren commenced. 'You are not far from the high-road, within easy walking distance from the sea, and not a single servant in the house dare be near the haunted part of the house after dark. Why, they would be safer there than in London!'

'What are you driving at?' asked Walter uneasily.

'Simply this—that your faithful old servitor knows something about those rooms he is in mortal fear some one else should discover. I need not tell you that my pretty little romance touching his lifetime's devotion was a pleasant fiction. Walter, there is something going on here, and we must find it out.'

'I am afraid I don't quite follow you,' Secretan returned. 'You see, if there had been anything going on, as you suggest, all these years, we must have heard something of it. Depend upon it, poor old Brookes's brain is giving way. Remember, he isn't far short of ninety.'

'No more mad than I am. I convinced him diplomatically that there would be no further interference on our part, and you should have seen the look of relief on his face—it was a study for an artist. Now, in the next place, as to these ghostly lights they talk about'—

'They certainly do exist,' said Secretan with quiet conviction. 'I have seen them myself many a time when I was a boy.'

'That exactly confirms what I say!' Warren exclaimed triumphantly. 'Now, look at it from a common-sense point of view. Can you believe for a moment that these lights are the work of supernatural agency?'

'It certainly seems contrary to common-sense.'

'It's contrary to all kinds of sense.—Now, listen here. After I had smoothed the old rascal down this morning, we fell into conversation, and by degrees I learnt a good deal of the life of your ghostly ancestor; and, with all due deference to your family pride, I must say a more thorough-paced scoundrel seldom existed. Though, perhaps, the less I say about rascally ancestors the better. Under pretence of wanting a window open, I lured Brookes away, and while his back was turned, I opened bluebeard's chamber with the key.'

'Did you go in?' Secretan asked interestedly, for by this time he had caught some of his companion's enthusiasm.

'It was too risky, especially after I had soothed the old boy's feelings so nicely. All I wanted was to know if the key would fit. It will fit. Now, on every Christmas Eve at midnight that light is seen; so the legend runs. If you are game for a little healthy excitement, you and I will know before morning the origin of this mysterious illumination.'

'You can count on me,' Secretan returned, rising and walking up and down the room, to conceal his excitement.—'How do you propose to do it?'

'I propose to do it now, and in this way. It's past eleven; all the others are safe in the drawing-room, and we shan't be missed for an hour. They'll think we are in the billiard-room. A couple of peacoats, a dark-lantern, and a brace of revolvers, and our preparations are complete. Is it a bargain?'

A burst of merry laughter as they passed the drawing-room door, mingled with the sound of a piano and some one singing, told the conspirators they had not been missed. As they crept silently along the quiet passages, feeling their way—for they dared not show a light from the dark-lantern—the stable clock chimed the three-quarters after eleven. A few minutes later, after a cautious walk along the unaccustomed corridors, they found themselves at length on the threshold of the chamber where, fifty-six years ago that very night, Arundel Secretan had ended his wasted life in his last hour of despair. Cautiously turning the key with many a creak and groan, the great door swung slowly open, and a second later, the conspirators found themselves safely inside.

Despite the fact of undoubted courage and resolution, each of them was conscious of a certain quickening of the heart and tightness of breath, which came as near fear as it was possible. A feeble moon was trying to struggle through a rushing mass of pendulous cloud, lighting the great oriel window; there was a cold icy draught in the apartment, chilling the adventurers in spite of their additional clothing. As their eyes gradually became accustomed to the gloom, they noticed a funeral bed to the right of the window, with sombre trappings shaking in the wind; and

placed in the centre of the window an ancient secretaire with a high carved back, and countless drawers down either side. Had the place been kept sweet and clean, the rats and mice and all-destroying moths driven away, the apartment might have been termed luxuriously furnished. As Warren and his friend noted these things, the stable clock gave out the hour of twelve with mournful cadence as the notes were borne away on the breast of the wind.

'Now for the family ghost,' Warren whispered eagerly—'the witching hour has come.—Is your revolver all right, Walter?'

'I hope you won't do anything rash,' said Secretan cautiously. 'Mind, no firing, if it is possible to avoid extremities.—Hist! what was that noise? Verily, we are going to see something, after all.'

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when the apartment began to be filled by a faint luminous light under the window, throwing the rest of the chamber into deepest shade. The illumination growing stronger, appeared to come from behind the old secretaire. Presently, above it rose two small points of flame, two wax candles in ancient silver candlesticks, and something which gratified the watchers' curiosity indeed. The holder of these lights—a man in the prime of life, with handsome features and full-bottomed wig, was dressed in plush knee-breeches and white silk hose; his feet clad in shoes, latched with heavy silver buckles. He wore also a peach-coloured velvet coat, slashed with pearl-gray silk, and ornamented with gold basket buttons. By his side, as was the fashion of the period, he carried a long rapier in an ornamental leather scabbard. For a moment he stood with his back to the secretaire, gazing earnestly around, then apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, turned to the desk, on which he placed the candles, and took out a bundle of papers. At this grave moment, the watchers, engrossed by this sudden apparition, with its pale deathlike features, were so startled that Warren burst into a sudden exclamation. Immediately the figure rose and confronted them; they saw the rapier flash from its sheath, as the shade of Arundel Secretan arose and started forward. But at this moment a gust of wind blew out the candles, leaving the apartment in darkness; there was a short mocking laugh; and by the time Warren had sufficiently recovered himself to swing round the slide of his lantern, the figure had vanished, leaving not the semblance of a trace behind.

There was the bundle of papers, but where was the spectre? That he could not have left by the door was clear, for that was fast shut, and search as they might, they could find no other exit. It seemed almost like a dream—the sudden entrance, the wonderful disappearance of the lights, and, last of all, the still more wonderful spiriting away of the figure.

Secretan sat down trembling in every limb; his face was white and set, while great beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. 'Come away from this,' he said hoarsely. 'It is like tampering with a dead man's secret. Warren, as sure as I am a living man, I have seen my ancestor, Arundel Secretan, to-night!'

'Arundel Secretan be hanged!' said Warren contemptuously, as he placed the packet of papers

in his pocket for future and closer reference. 'Your nerves are all unstrung. It was that cunning old scoundrel Brookes, man! I could swear to those sinister eyes among a thousand.'

THE DEATH OF 'BLUE BILLY.'

THOSE of our readers who are familiar with the name of Blue Billy, when they read the title of this chapter, will be ready to ask: 'Is Blue Billy really dead?' and those unacquainted with the name will have some curiosity to know who or what was Blue Billy, how he died, and how he was buried—if he had many mourners, or died friendless in the workhouse. To all such inquiries, the answer must be given—that Blue Billy is not dead yet, but dying; and when he is gone, no one will mourn for him. He is friendless. Those who know him best, hate him most. He is the pest of our towns. He stinketh in the nostrils of the people. His breath tarnishes the fine metals, destroys gilding, picture-frames, bookbindings, and steel plates. Every person shuns Billy. The only good word that was ever said of him was, that sometimes he did good to patients suffering from whooping-cough.

Most people are acquainted with Blue Billy, although perhaps they do not know him by this name. He is the cause of the smell that we experience when we pass a gaswork. Blue Billy is the technical name given to the lime rendered foul in the purification of the gas. To a great extent it is this lime, when it is removed from the purifiers, that makes gasworks a nuisance. We are probably now on the eve of a new era in the manufacture of gas, and there is every probability that the time is not far distant when gasworks will be carried on without causing offensive smells, and when gas will be supplied to the consumers so free from impurities that it will be harmless alike to the most delicate flowers and the finest gilding in a drawing-room. The purification of gas in close vessels has occupied the attention of gas engineers for many years, and it may now be said that the problem has been solved. To enable the general reader to understand the new method, we shall endeavour to explain the process of purification, or as much of it as will be sufficient for our purpose.

Crude gas as it issues from the retorts is charged with various impurities. Chief among these are ammonia, carbonic acid, and sulphur compounds, all of which ought to be removed before the gas is sent to the consumers. Ammonia is a very volatile gas, for which water has such a strong affinity that, at ordinary temperature and atmospheric pressure, it will take up nearly one thousand times its own volume. In order, therefore, to free the gas from ammonia, it is only necessary to pass it through water, when the ammonia will be absorbed, and the other constituents of the gas will pass on. Chemists have discovered two classes of substances, which they call acids and alkalies. These have such a strong affinity for one another, that the moment they are brought into contact, they unite, and form what is called a salt. Ammonia is one of the alkalies; whilst the other impurities, carbonic acid and the various sulphur compounds, are in their nature acid. The affinity

of the acids for alkalies supplies us with the means of removing the second class of impurities by bringing them into contact with an alkali. The substances hitherto used are lime and oxide of iron. Limestone is a carbonate of lime, or a compound of the metal calcium and carbonic acid. When we burn limestone, the heat wrenches the carbonic acid and the lime asunder; and carbonic acid being a gas, it passes into the air and leaves the solid lime behind. It is then said to be in the caustic state. In this condition it is ready again to take up carbonic acid and to unite with it whenever they are brought into contact. But it will also unite with sulphuretted hydrogen. Carbonic acid and sulphuretted hydrogen being the principal impurities in coal-gas, in the process of purification the gas is made to pass through caustic lime, which, by virtue of its chemical affinity, arrests these impurities, and allows the pure gas to pass to the gasholder. But by-and-by the lime gets foul, and the purifiers require to be opened and the lime removed. This is attended with a considerable amount of manual labour; and the smell from the spent lime is not only offensive but highly prejudicial to health. Gas engineers and chemists have long exercised their ingenuity in devising means for doing away with this source of nuisance. The ammonia derived from the gas itself is the agent used to effect this purpose.

It has been already said that the ammonia is washed out of the gas by passing it through water, the water holding it in solution. In this condition it is in the forms of carbonate and sulphide of ammonia. But, just as in the case of limestone, the carbonic acid and sulphuretted hydrogen can be driven away by heat, and the ammonia retained in the water in the caustic state, ready, like the caustic lime, to take up these impurities whenever they are brought into contact with it. This is done in close vessels; and when the process is adopted, a gaswork will no longer be a nuisance to the neighbourhood. The same ammoniacal water is used over and over. As it becomes foul, it is revived by heating it with steam and dispelling the carbonic acid and sulphuretted hydrogen; and a few sets of pumps take the place of manual labour. The same ammoniacal water being used repeatedly, there will of course be a surplus of ammonia. This surplus may be rendered of commercial value as liquid ammonia; or, utilising the impurities carbonic acid and sulphuretted hydrogen, it may be converted into carbonate and sulphate of ammonia.

Thus, those impurities which gas managers, formerly, were glad to get rid of by any means, may be converted into marketable and valuable products. The process has been tried experimentally with undoubted success in Manchester; and at present, the gasworks in Belfast are being fitted up with apparatus for this method of purification after recent patents by Mr Claus of London. A process lately patented by Mr Young of Peebles, introducing important modifications, promises simplicity and economy, and was a short time ago brought prominently before the North British Association of Gas Managers, by whom it was regarded as a valuable contribution towards the economy and perfecting of the purification of illuminating gas; and arrangements were made

for its practical working. A matter of such importance to gas consumers and to gas shareholders in particular cannot fail to be regarded with general interest.

THE OLD WAY AND THE NEW.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT morning the tardily breaking November dawn, came all too soon for Matthew Roding; he would have been glad never to see daylight again. He rose earlier than usual, shaved, dressed himself with his customary care, and went down to breakfast; but all his actions this morning were like those of an automaton, and seemed to be governed by no basis of conscious effort. On the table he found three or four post-letters; Grigson would bring the business letters later on. These he took up one after another, and glanced over the superscriptions, as if from them alone it were possible to divine the nature of their contents. One he tore open, the rest he pushed aside as being of little or no consequence. The letter in question ran as follows:

MY DEAR RODING—I should have redeemed those African bonds of mine some time ago, but have only just returned from Scarborough, where I have been laid up for the last six weeks with a confounded attack of gout. I am sorry to hear that you also are indisposed, but trust you will be as right as a trivet again in the course of a few days. I will call upon you to-morrow (Friday) at two o'clock precisely, bringing with me the five hundred pounds, together with the interest as agreed upon, when I trust it will be convenient for you to return me the bonds. The five hundred pounds was of great service to me at the time, and my hearty thanks are due to you for the kind way in which you helped me to tide over my little difficulty.—Believe me, my dear Roding, very truly yours,

VINCENT FITCH.

'Fitch's letter could not have come at a more opportune moment,' said Matthew to himself. 'If he had not written to me, I should have been compelled to write to him. His five hundred pounds is the one little nest-egg I intended all along, unknown to anybody, to save out of the general crash, should the worst come to the worst, which, unluckily, it has. The notice is rather short; still, it will do. Ruff promised to be here soon after nine. I'll give him the key of the private safe as soon as he comes, and pack him off to the City to fetch the bonds. He seems anxious to be of use; besides which, I want Grigson for other matters.'

He was alone this morning, as he had been for many mornings lately—his wife seeming of set purpose to avoid putting in an appearance till after he had done breakfast and gone to his own room.

Shortly afterwards, Ruff arrived. 'How are

you this morning, father?' he asked, with an anxiety he could not hide.

'Better, my boy, better both in health and spirits,' he answered with a sigh. 'It was the uncertainty that weighed me down so dreadfully before.—But that's at an end now,' he added with a dismal attempt at a laugh. 'The verdict has been brought in and sentence passed; I know now what I have to face.' Then, a moment or two later: 'I've something for you to do this morning, if you have a couple of hours to spare.'

'I am entirely at your service for as long as you may want me.'

'Then take this key—it is that of my private safe—and hurry down to my office in Throgmorton Street. There you will find Bunker, who probably is known to you already. Give him the key and ask him to open the safe. Inside it, he will find a bundle of papers tied together and labelled, "Congo Electric Lighting Company: Mr Fitch." After giving you the papers, he will relock the safe and return you the key. You will then make your way back as quickly as possible. But, above all things, be careful that you neither lose the papers nor have them stolen from you.'

'Never fear, sir,' said Ruff confidently, as he nodded and left the room. He had seen Grandad for a few minutes last evening before leaving the house, and had told him as much of how matters stood as had come to his knowledge. Greatly to Ruff's wonder, his grandfather had listened to him without any expression of surprise or betrayal of emotion of any kind. What did it mean? the young artist asked himself. Was Grandad becoming too old—in a word, too fossilised—to be affected by anything, however nearly it might seem to concern him? Knowing the old man as he did, Ruff could scarcely believe that. Or, which seemed hardly more likely, had he been aware all along how matters were going with his son, so that Ruff's news was really no news to him at all? In any case, Grandad was impenetrable, and Ruff had to take home his questions unanswered.

Matthew Roding's breakfast this morning was the merest apology for a meal. He was anxious for the arrival of Grigson; many minor matters had been neglected or overlooked of late which it was absolutely necessary should be attended to without further delay. He knew, of course, that he was ruined—that was a fact nothing could alter or modify; but without Grigson's assistance, it would be a work of some time and difficulty to ascertain the exact position of his affairs. But the minutes passed on without bringing the young clerk. Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock came and went, and still he had not arrived. What could have detained him? Matthew Roding began to pace the room, oppressed by vague fears of he knew not what.

Twelve o'clock arrived in due course, and then half-past, by which time he had nearly worked himself up to fever heat. At last a knock and ring. He was sitting with his back to the door, and did not take the trouble to look round when he heard some one enter the room. 'You are late, very late, Grigson,' he began. Then he turned, and his eyes fell, not on Grigson, but on

his son and Peter Bunker. There was that in the faces of both which told him, before either of them spoke, that they were the bringers of ill tidings.

'I thought it was Grigson who had come at last. Where is he? Why is he not here?' he asked quickly. His hand trembled as it rested on the back of his chair. Surely Fate could have no further blow in store for him! Had he not already drained the cup of misfortune to the dregs?

'I have seen nothing of Mr Grigson this morning, sir; but he looked in at the office rather late last evening—between eight and nine o'clock, in point of fact,' said Peter in his usual deferential way.

'Ah! What did he want there at that time of night?' asked Mr Roding with a startled look.

'He said that you had sent him, sir.'

'That I had sent him! What for, pray?'

'For a packet of papers that was locked up in the private safe.'

'I sent him for no papers.—But go on. What happened next?'

'Mr Grigson unlocked the private safe in my presence, sir—of course he had brought the key with him—and took away the papers he had come for. He said that, late as it was, you particularly wanted them to be placed in your hands last evening.'

'But—but—I hardly understand,' said Matthew, pressing his hand to his head with an air of bewilderment. 'How was it possible for Grigson to obtain access to the private safe when the key of it was never out of my possession till I placed it in my son's hands this morning?'

'I cannot say how that may be, sir,' answered Peter. 'All I know is that Mr Grigson had a key with him last evening which fitted the safe and opened it without difficulty. It was the fact of his having that key, sir, which I know you seldom or never let out of your own keeping, that lulled all suspicions I might otherwise have had.'

Matthew turned to his son. 'Did you ascertain for a fact, by personal examination of the safe this morning, that the Congo bonds for which I sent you were not there?'

'I did. There were no such papers in the safe.'

Matthew Roding sank back in his chair like a man utterly confounded. 'I see it all!' he exclaimed. 'The rogue—the unmitigated villain! I have been robbed, and by a man whom I trusted as I would have trusted my own brother. The consummate scoundrel!'

For a little space no one spoke. Then Mr Roding sighed deeply, once—twice. 'This is the last straw,' he said, turning to his son. 'I thought that nothing more could happen to me—that I had tasted the worst, and yet, see how mistaken I was!'

'But by what means did Grigson obtain possession of the key?'

'It was not my key he made use of, but a duplicate one. By what diabolical means he became possessed of it, I cannot even imagine. He must have laid his plans long ago and have been biding his time. He knew I was ruined—he knew the end had come, and that he had nothing more to expect from me. He knew the

Congo bonds were in the safe, and that, if he wanted to convert them to his own use, he had no time to lose. The consummate villain! And I put such trust in him, Ruff, such utter trust! It is like a wound from a two-edged sword.'

'Will the loss be a heavy one?'

'You shall judge. Some eight or nine months ago, this Mr Fitch, who calls himself an architect and surveyor, but who is in reality a speculative builder in a large way of business, brought me a lot of Congo bonds, on which he asked me to advance him five hundred pounds, of course at a fair rate of interest. It was out of my usual line of business; but as Fitch is a neighbour and has visited several times at my house, and as my wife and his were very intimate, I strained a point to oblige him, and found him the coin. Although Congos were not of much account in the market at that time, I had reason to believe that they would take a favourable turn before long, and I felt that I had ample security for my money. I was fully justified by the event. Before a month was over, Congos began to rise steadily, and have been going up ever since, so that to-day the bonds on which I advanced five hundred pounds are worth three thousand.'

Ruff, whose knowledge of financial matters was of the most elementary kind, was evidently puzzled by his father's explanation.

'I had a note from Fitch this morning,' resumed Mr Roding. 'He will be here at two o'clock to-day, bringing with him the five hundred pounds in order to redeem his bonds; and I have no bonds to give him!'

'But as you have no bonds to give Mr Fitch, he will of course retain his five hundred pounds, in which case I suppose you will be in a position to cry quits?' Ruff ventured to remark.

'That a son of mine should be such a simpleton!' said Mr Roding with a little scornful laugh. 'Did I not tell you that the bonds I am supposed to have in my possession are at the present time worth three thousand pounds? Even granting Fitch were willing to let me have them at their market value, I should have to hand him over a balance of two thousand five hundred pounds in order to square the transaction—a trifle which at present I don't happen to be possessed of,' he added dryly.

Ruff's face fell; he had not a word more to say.

Mr Roding scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it to his son. 'That is Grigson's address,' he said. 'Take the first hansom you can lay hold of and drive there. Ascertain when the fellow was last at his rooms, and anything further about his movements that may possibly be of service to us. Not that anything you may discover is likely to be of much avail. No doubt he knew where to find not one but a hundred customers for the bonds, had he needed them. It would hardly be a couple of hours' work for such a clever rogue to get rid of them, receive an open cheque in payment, rush off to the bank, get the cheque cashed, and start for the continent, or whatever place he intends to favour with his presence. I've not the least doubt that he's miles away from London by this time.'

Ruff took up his hat and gloves.

'If possible,' added Mr Roding, 'I should like you to be back by the time Fitch arrives. I shall probably need the testimony both of you and

Bunker to confirm the truth of what I shall have to say to him.—How will he take it? There's the rub.—Oh, if I had but my fingers at that villain's throat, they would never lose their hold while there was a spark of life in his vile carcass!—Leave me now, both of you, but be in the way when Fitch arrives.'

Ruff came back in due course, with the information that Grigson had not been at his lodgings since eleven o'clock the previous night, when he had packed a small portmanteau and announced that he was going out of town for a few days' holiday. It was no more than Matthew Roding had expected to hear. He deferred taking further steps in the case till after his interview with Mr Fitch.

Punctually to his time, that worthy arrived. He stared a little at finding that Mr Roding was not alone. 'My son and one of my clerks,' said the latter laconically as he shook hands with his visitor.

Mr Fitch gave a curt nod, then coughed behind his hand and took the seat indicated to him. He was a short, stout, bull-necked man, with purple cheeks and round, protruding eyes. He was dressed in black; a ponderous gold chain meandered over his waistcoat; on one of his thick, podgy fingers flashed a large diamond, which seemed to acquire additional lustre from the grubbiness of the hand it was supposed to adorn.

'Well, Roding, here I am, punctual to a tick,' he began, as he sat down and ran his fingers through his hair. 'I've got the rhino, and you've got the bonds. Exchange is no robbery, as the old saying has it. Five minutes will complete our little business.' While speaking, he had produced a bulky pocket-book, which he now opened, and proceeded, with a sort of affectionate tenderness, to finger the bank-notes therein.

Evidently, Matthew Roding was at a loss in what terms to begin his explanation. 'I am exceedingly sorry to inform you, Mr Fitch, that I have not got your bonds,' he said at last with a degree of hesitation very unusual with him.

Mr Fitch's goggle eyes seemed as though they would start out of his head. 'Eh, now, how's that? Not a long enough notice, perhaps? But I thought you would only have to fetch them out of your safe, or wherever you keep such things.'

'Just what I thought myself, till two hours ago. This morning, I gave the key of my private safe to my son—not being able to go down to the City myself—and asked him to fetch the bonds for me and bring them here in readiness for you; but on proceeding to open the safe, they were not to be found.'

The purple in Mr Fitch's cheeks deepened visibly; he gasped like a fish suddenly taken out of water.

'Before you say anything, pray hear me out,' went on Mr Roding. He then, as succinctly as possible, proceeded to tell his hearer when and how the bonds had been stolen, finishing up by saying: 'I thought it best that my son and my clerk should both be present in order that they may be able to confirm the truth of what I have just told you.'

'This is a very strange story that I have had to listen to, Mr Roding—a very strange story, indeed,' said Fitch after a pause. 'Cleverly concocted, without a doubt; but I must tell you at once, sir, that I don't believe a single word of it.' While speaking, he had stuffed the notes back into his pocket-book, which he now shut with a loud snap.

A deep flush mounted to Matthew Roding's face, and his thick eyebrows came together ominously. 'I hope you don't mean to imply, Mr Fitch, that I and these two gentlemen have leagued ourselves together to impose upon you with a pack of lies?'

'All I've got to say is that I don't believe the yarn; it ain't good enough,' remarked the other doggedly.

It was only by an effort that Matthew controlled himself. 'I deplore the unfortunate occurrence quite as much as you can do, Mr Fitch,' he said coldly; 'but really, I am at a loss to know what further evidence I can adduce to prove the truth of what I have told you.'

'Deplore—deplore!' retorted the other with a scornful snort. 'You don't think I'm such a fool as to be put off with a few fine words! Do you know, sir, what those bonds of mine, which you hold, or ought to hold, are worth in the market at the present time?'

'I am quite aware of their current value.'

'I knew it—I hadn't a doubt of it. Yes, yes, you know the value of 'em, never fear! Three thousand pounds—that's what they're worth, not a farthing less. How much did you sell them for, eh, Mr Roding? how much did you sell them for?'

Before Matthew could reply, Ruff sprang to his feet and, crossing the room in a couple of strides, flung open the window. 'Father,' he said quietly, as he proceeded to turn up his cuffs, 'just allow me to have the pleasure of flinging this old rhinoceros out of the window.'

Mr Fitch's face turned a yellowish white; he hastily put his pocket-book out of sight.

'Sit down, Ruff; I command you!' said Mr Roding authoritatively. Slowly and reluctantly Ruff pulled down the window, but he did not go back to his seat.

There was an awkward silence, which Fitch was the first to break. 'Perhaps, Mr Roding, if you *can't* produce the bonds,' he said with an ill-concealed sneer, 'although, in point of law, mind you, you are bound to do so, or else lay yourself open to an indictment for fraud—perhaps, sir, in that case you are prepared to write me out a cheque for the difference between the amount I am indebted to you, principal and interest, and the market price of my property. It would be a trifle over two thousand four hundred pounds, as I reckon it; but that of course would be a mere fleabite to an eminent financier like you!'

Matthew Roding felt as though he were stretched on the rack. 'Mr Fitch,' he said, not without a certain dignity, 'I don't know whether or not you are aware of it—you may have heard of it, or you may not—but the fact is I am a ruined man. I have not more than a couple of hundred pounds in the world that I can call my own.'

'I expected to be told that—I quite expected

it. A man in possession, hey? etcetrar, etcetrar. Ah, ah! You see I know more than you thought I did.'

Ruff coughed and opened the window a couple of inches. Mr Fitch gave an uneasy glance over his shoulder.

'If these things are known to you, there is no need for me to say another word,' said Mr Roding haughtily.

'But I've got a few words to say to you, Mr Roding—a few words that you will find very much to the purpose,' remarked Fitch as he rose, pushed back his chair, and proceeded to button his overcoat. 'I give you till twelve o'clock to-morrow, sir—till twelve o'clock, not one minute longer, in which to produce either the bonds or the money. Either of 'em will do for me; I don't care a dump which it is. But if neither is forthcoming by noon to-morrow, I tell you candidly that I shall at once make it my business to go to the nearest police magistrate and apply for a warrant against you. I think there's no occasion for me to add another word.—Good-morning, Mr Roding; good-morning, gentlemen all—hem.' He had got hold of his hat and umbrella while speaking, and now, after a final glance over his shoulder at Ruff, he beat a somewhat undignified retreat from the room.

A YEAR AGO.

Just a little year ago,
You were all to me;
Even yet, I scarcely know
How such things can be.

Did you mean it all the time?
Were you false or true?
Is it change of place or time
That has altered you?

Did you think to love me still?
Did your fancy stray?
Did you change against your will,
When you went away?

Do you still remember this,
Many miles apart?
Ah! you left your careless kias
Printed on my heart!

Little did my soul divine
That the year would see
Your dear heart, close knit to mine,
Drift away from me.

Yet I dream you brave and true;
Through the mists of pain,
Still I stretch my hands to you
Till we meet again.

Just a little year ago!
Ah! my eyes are wet!
Cruel Love! do you not know
I can ne'er forget?

MYRA.

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